

Snapshots 2004

Highlighting BLM projects that support the National Fire Plan.



August 27

California

Butte County Community Collaboration Pays Off

More than \$112-million worth of property has been protected from wildfire after fuel breaks, defensible space and community education activities in northern California were completed between 2001 to 2004. BLM grants totalling approximately \$282,270 were used on pre-fire activities in the local area in collaboration with fire safe councils and communities at risk to achieve success.

Level of the success from completing defensible space work was dramatically illustrated on August

11 this year when the Oregon Fire near Lake Oroville in Butte County, California scorched over 1,800 acres. While this fire burning in foothill chaparral, oak and pine did burn 17 structures, more than 200 homes were saved due to the pre-fire defensible space work done in the community.

The experience of two families helps tell the story.



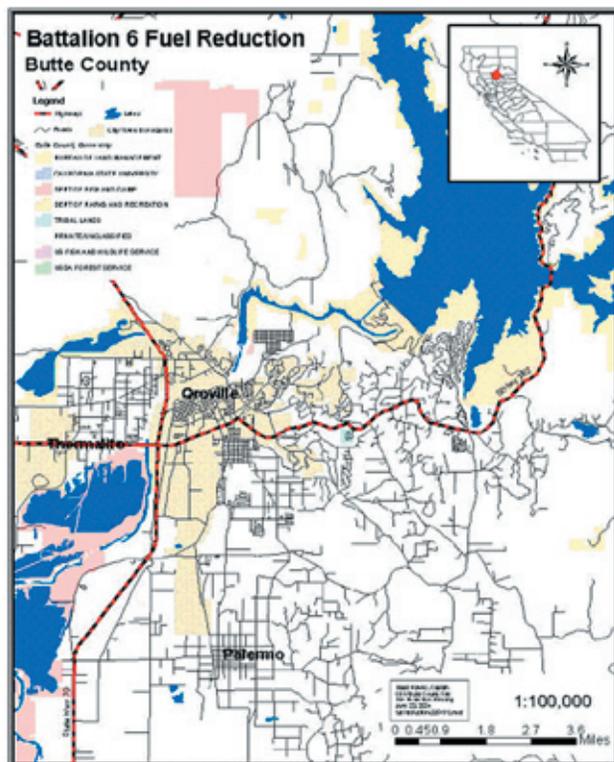
Part of the 1,800 acres burned in the Oregon Fire on August 11 this year. Nearly 200 homes were saved from this fire due to community pre-fire work.

Due to work that had been done to clear fuels and create defensible space, the Bangor, California Fire Department were able to defend the home, and thanked the owners for the work they had done. Another home being built had nearly been surrounded by the fire. Fire Information Officer John Simon was certain the structure would be lost, but a defensible space area along with suppression efforts, kept the house standing. Carole Robirds, a neighbor living half of a mile from the Walkers, was prepared with defensible space, new roads signs, and double-pane windows. Her property was used as a safety zone for fire crews.

The Butte County Fire Safe Council, Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council, and California Department of Forestry and Fire along with local partners have done significant work to educate and assist this rural community in preparing for wildfires.

Historically there have been other large fires in the Yankee Hill, Concow, and Paradise areas. The Concow Fire in 2000, Raulson Fire in 1994 and Dry Fire in 1992 burned total of

Butte Unit
Fire Management Plan
2004



Butte County Fire Management Plan map.

In October 2003, the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council provided Shanti and Mayama Tommaro with a home assessment, videos and pre-fire planning guidelines to help them protect their home. In response, they widened a road, cleared vegetation and completed defensible space around the home. They included a posted sign outside the driveway designating their swimming pool as a water source to assist in fire suppression efforts. When the fire threatened on August 11 this year, firefighters were able to save the home due to the defensible work that had been done.

The Walker family owns a home nearby, and the fire approached several sides of their property.

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Local residents Shanti and Mayama Tommaro completed defensible home protection work that paid off during the Oregon fire.



Making the road wider and using the home swimming pool as a water source for firefighters helped protect the home.



Mr. and Mrs. Walker in front of their home that was nearly surrounded by fire. Because they had completed defensible space work, the home was saved by firefighters.

3,645 acres. Increasing population, heavy fuel loading and fire history have created a high potential for large catastrophic wildfires. Through collaborative and strategic planning efforts these communities are now implementing pre-fire activities that are continuing to demonstrate success in decreasing losses from wildfires.

A History of Successful Collaboration

The Bureau of Land Management through their Community Assistance Program granted Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council \$16,740 for their 2001 Yankee Hill and Concow Community Fire Safe Education Program, which includes a Defensible Space Demonstration Site and the "Dooryard" Education Program. In 2001, this project was expected to protect at least 32 homes and decrease predicted suppression costs by \$5.6 million. The area has since grown and home values increased. It is currently estimated that 200 homes valued at approximately \$39 million were protected from the Oregon Fire in the Yankee Hill-Cherokee and Concow areas.

In 2003, BLM provided \$49,510 to the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council for the Jordan Hill Shaded Fuel Break

and Outreach Program, which would continue the "Dooryard" visits in the Concow area. This 55-acre fuel break, in combination with two other project phases, was designed to protect approximately 1,154 homes in the Concow Basin and Paradise Ridge. The Redding Field Office completed a 40-acre portion of the break on BLM land in August 2003.



The Paradise Fire Safe Council received a 2003 BLM grant for \$76,600 for the West Branch Fuel Break, which created a three to four mile long 56 acre fuel break along the ridge of Dean Road south to the Feather River Hospital.



Before and after photos of the Jordan Hill Shaded fuel break. The work was done through a BLM community assistance grant to the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council.

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This home under construction was saved from the August 11 fire due to the defensible space work that had been done.

contained within one quarter of an acre. Approximately 75 homes, valued at \$18 million were protected due to the presence of the break.

With implementation of the National Fire Plan and California Fire Plan, the California Department of Forestry has developed Fire Management Plans to address pre-fire and suppression strategies for different units across the state. With continuing guidance for collaborative community wildfire protection planning, these plans are being adapted and adopted by fire safe councils to meet their strategic planning needs. BLM is also in the process of updating fire management plans to better incorporate collaborative community planning.

Results of the cooperative approach to establish fire safe homes and property is paying off in a big way!

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Listed Species Habitat Improvement through Prescribed Fire

In 2004, The Bureau of Land Management's Bishop, California Field Office, Inyo National Forest, and California Department of Fish and Game, implemented two prescribed fires to help protect the Fish Slough watershed from potential catastrophic wildfires and to assist in habitat enhancement for two federally listed species, the Owens pupfish (*Cyprinodon radiosus*) and Fish Slough milk-vetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *piscinensis*).

In close proximity to Bishop, Fish Slough is a fresh water marsh of substantial size which annually provides a large quantity of dead aquatic vegetation that is highly susceptible to wildfire. Bishop is listed as a community at risk and is a priority area in fire mitigation planning.

Fish Slough is also one of a few locations where native populations of



BLM staff lighting off vegetation with drip torch.

the federally endangered Owens pupfish still occur. The Owens pupfish, a tiny desert fish uniquely adapted to conditions in the Owens Valley, is in danger of extinction from habitat alteration and the competition and predation of non-native fish.

The Fish Slough milk-vetch, listed as a federally threatened plant found only in this location, is highly restricted in its distribution to the alkali flat habitat bordering the fresh water marsh. This species is susceptible to excessively wet soils which negatively affect reproduction. The human altered water table in Fish Slough is a



Fish Slough before the prescribed fire with dead and overgrown vegetation.

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direct contributor to degraded habitat conditions for this very rare species.

In February this year, agencies cooperated to burn a half acre portion of the project occurring in the 36,000 acre BLM Fish Slough Area of Critical Environmental Concern. In March an additional 23 acres of neighboring Department of Fish and Game land was burned. These fires were implemented with minimal impact techniques and helped remove a build-up of cattails and downed woody material that were obstructing hydrologic enhancements planned for the pupfish and the milk-vetch plant. With much of the vegetation removed, more natural hydrologic functions could be restored which should result in reduced populations of non-native predatory species and improve habitat conditions for the pupfish and milk-vetch.

The natural occurrence or prescription of fire, in a carefully managed scenario, can be used to cleanse and restore the health of an ecosystem. The Fish Slough prescribed fire project carefully balances the protection and enhancement of community, watershed, and wildlife resources.

Contact: Terry Russi, Wildlife Biologist, 760-872-5035 or Fire Management Officer, Matt Kingsely at 760-872-5056

Bakersfield Fire Planning and Community Collaboration

BLM's Bakersfield Field Office recently drafted a wildland fire management plan incorporating a successful collaborative process for protecting communities in the wildland-urban interface. An energetic interdisciplinary staff involved in the initial fire planning efforts made an easy transition to incorporate

community wildfire protection strategies into the planning.

National guidance on collaborative planning offers a general process, but lacks a personal touch that is needed to connect with the local community. Success in community collaboration revolves around individual attitudes and charismatic personalities requiring early and continuous communications between BLM staff, partner agencies, and affected and interested publics.

The Kern River Valley Fire Safe Plan is the basis for many wildland urban interface projects in the Lake Isabella Area. This plan, funded through National Fire Plan grants, outlines and prioritizes community projects which were developed by the community working in coordination with a contractor and partner agencies. Community projects are incorporated, when feasible, into a BLM fuels plan which may be modified to meet BLM needs and guidelines. Thus far BLM has successfully implemented



Poster created to promote community involvement in fire planning. Artwork by Miriam Morrill.

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several community projects in conjunction with the Kern County Fire Department.

The public is also involved at the project level. Involvement begins early in the planning stages, with Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist Debbie Santiago presenting proposed projects to the Fire Safe Council for review and comment. Early in BLM's National Environmental Policy Act compliance process, information about the proposed project is mailed to landowners and other affected publics in the area. An accompanying letter states the proposed action, the need, and gives the public contact information in case they have questions.

This process seems to be successful. The community is involved early the planning process and during project development and implementation. The Bakersfield BLM office actively participates in community planning strategies and provides technical and other assistance where possible in community fire protection efforts.

Contact: Deborah Santiago, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist, Bakersfield Field Office (661) 391-6097

Community Chipping Efforts in the Eastern Sierras-More Chips Than a Keebler® Cookie Commercial

Talk about loads of chips. Not the kind the Keebler® elves use for baking cookies, but woodchips. The collaborative efforts of the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service have cooked up a community chipping program that produces loads of chips and one sweet reputation.

The chipping program is focused at reducing hazardous fuels around at-risk communities adjacent to public lands managed by the Bishop Field Office and the Inyo National Forest. These well-rounded efforts put the preparation work in the hands of the community, while the chipping work is shouldered by the agencies.

In May 2004, the Wheeler Crest Fire Protection District, Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council, BLM, and forest service prepared for Wildfire Awareness Week by hosting a neighborhood fuel reduction and chipping event for the Swall Meadows area. Community volunteers went door-to-door, distributing information about defensible space and the upcoming program activities. Prior to the weekend chipping event, homeowners cut and piled woody materials less than ten



Crews work to reduce cleared fuel into chips.

inches in diameter within five feet of the street. BLM and the forest service then traveled with two chipper machines down each street of the neighborhood, shredding the piles and putting it in homeowner's yards as mulch.

In early-June, Inyo National Forest and June Lake Fire Department hosted a community defensible space and chipping event. BLM and Inyo National Forest provided a chipper machine at the June Mountain Ski Area parking lot where residents could bring woody material to be chipped. Residents also dropped off other vegetation at the parking lot where a truck was available to haul the material to the dump.

During the week of June 26, residents in the Old Mammoth area participated in their first community chipping event. Many community volunteers went door-to-door to educate and involve their neighbors in the upcoming defensible space activities. It was a hugely successful event that included local residents, Mammoth Lakes Fire Department, Mammoth Lakes Fire Safe Council, three engine crews, a fire use crew, and BLM and forest service employees. Over 90 piles of branches and dead woody



Interagency chipping program for communities in the Eastern Sierras.

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material were chipped over a five-day period. At the end, homeowners reclaimed the chipped material for use around their homes and other materials were donated to the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area for use in erosion control.

The key ingredients to these successful community events, as spoken by Jeff Power, Mammoth Ranger District's Fire Management Officer "have been the strong interagency cooperation and the enthusiasm and commitment of community members". There are more things cooking in the eastern Sierra communities than just cookies. There's teamwork, motivation, agency support and those ever popular community barbecues!

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Utah

National Fire Plan – Healthy Forest Initiative Pays Huge Dividend, Fire Break Protects Utah Community

It's a tragic story, one heard all too frequently during recent fire seasons: wildfire sweeps through a community. Homes are destroyed and with them the family treasures of those who fled. Cherished pets die in the blaze. Sometimes people die.

That could have been the story of the small southwestern Utah town of Central had it not been for the combined efforts of the community working with state and federal agencies to prepare for the possibility of wildland fire. At about 4 p.m. on Thursday, August 12, lightning ignited the Cal Hollow Fire in pinyon and

juniper woodland northwest of the town. On this hot, windy summer afternoon fire swept through the trees, hot embers blew on the wind, and it headed straight for the town. At 6 p.m. more than 100 households were evacuated.

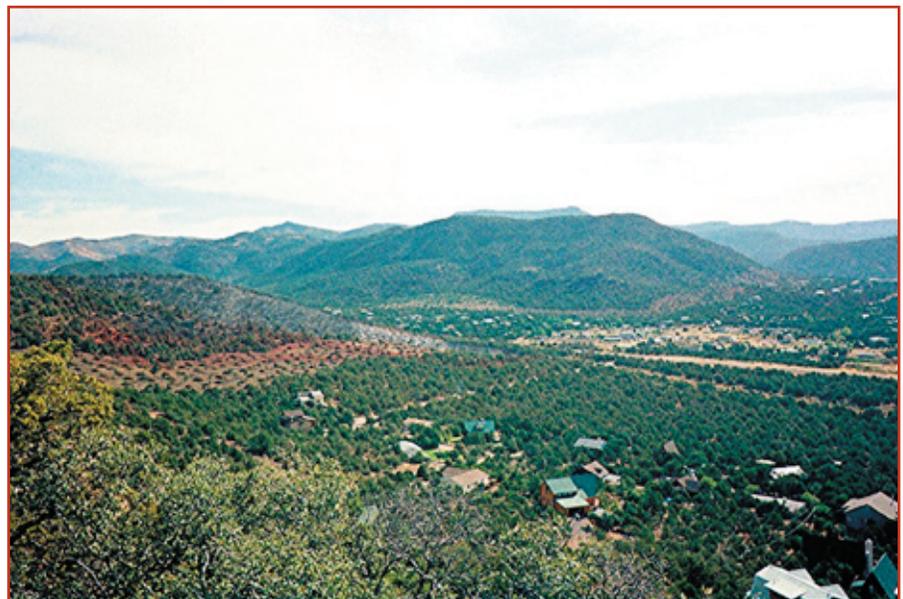
This story could have ended like so many – except that this town was surrounded by a fuel break - a fuel break that was built as a cooperative effort by the people of Central and several state and federal agencies utilizing National Fire Plan dollars. Like many urban-interface communities, Central has state, private, Bureau of Land Management, and Forest Service land surrounding it. In order to buffer the community from wildland fires, all these groups worked as a team under a chartered organization called The Color Country Fuels and WUI Committee.

The result of that effort paid off big when the fire hit last week. The fuel break slowed the raging fire and "it laid down," said Fire Warden Bill Murphy, "That gave us a chance to get

the air tankers there. The fuel break was the key. When the fire moved into the crowns of the trees, I knew for sure we would have lost homes without it. It the put the fire on the ground and gave us time." By 10 p.m. the fire had been contained and residents returned to their homes. No one was hurt. No structures were lost.

The first to reach the fire was the Central Volunteer Fire Department with two wildland engines, appropriate personal protective equipment, and wildland training under their belts. Again, National Fire Plan money through the Rural Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance programs helped to prepare these volunteers for this fire by providing the equipment and training they needed.

"A few years ago, if a fire had started near Central, it would have easily crowned in the windy conditions typical of the area," said District Ranger Bevan Killpack, "There was nothing to stop a fire from burning right through the town. And the people of Central wouldn't have been able to



The community of Central, Utah, was saved in August 2004 by a fuel break.

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The photo shows the fuel break surrounding the Central community. The fire entered the break, then dropped to the ground.

tackle the fire. They weren't prepared for wildland fires."

Need met opportunity. President Bush's Healthy Forest Initiative, launched in 2002, sought some projects that would demonstrate the use of streamlined environmental analysis to meet urgent needs for fuel reduction. Because Central was one of the top ten "communities at risk" for wildfire in Utah, the Color Country Fuels and WUI Committee decided that the area would make an excellent choice.

Approval for the demonstration project was quickly obtained, but it took some talking to get homeowners to support it. "Fuel breaks are a little unsightly," says Larry LaForte, local fire management officer for the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State lands. "Many people liked the look of dense woodland right up against their property boundary." Forest Service, BLM, and Utah State Forestry, Fire, and State lands employees partnered with the Community Fire Counsel to persuade homeowners of the need for a fuel break and defensible space around their homes. Reluctant homeowners were convinced.

Fred Fray, chairman of the Central Community Fire Council was one of the local leaders who worked tirelessly with homeowners, community leaders, and others to ensure their community was prepared, "The fire council not only agrees with the Healthy Forest Initiative goals, but has proven that it works." said Fray.

The Healthy Forest Restoration Act was enacted by the Bush Administration to expand on National Fire Plan goals by helping counter the growing problem of catastrophic wildland fires in the West. "Communities like Central are sprouting up all over the nation in the wildland urban interface and are creating major fire hazards for people and property." said BLM Cedar City Field Office Manager, Todd Christensen, "Creating defensible space both within and outside the community gave us the opportunity to succeed. This is what HFRA is all about."

The streamlined analysis of the Central Fuel Break Project was completed in August of last year, and no one appealed. The State had already cut fuels breaks on their portion of the surrounding land when the Forest Service started work last fall. Homeowners removed brush and lopped trees around their homes. By spring, the communities were protected, although slash piles remained for disposal this winter. The BLM will complete its portion of the fuel break this fall.

"There are a lot of slash piles you won't have burn this winter," said Gerald Schiefer, assistant fire warden of Pine Valley. They had burned "fiercely" the night before.

Speaking to Cyndi Sidles, fuels specialist for the Pine Valley Ranger District of the Dixie National Forest, the day after the fire, Schiefer continued, "Thank you for doing the fire break. It probably saved Central last night and it significantly slowed the fire. This allowed for defensive action for the homes... even though there was a good wind until the air drops could be made. You guys are our heroes."

The agencies involved modestly decline the title of hero, but say they hope the survival of Central will motivate other people in other communities to support fuel reduction on neighboring public lands and in their own back yards.

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Lackey Fan Prescribed Fire Improves Wildlife Forage and Range Conditions

BLM's Moab, Utah Field Office, in cooperation with grazing permittee Lowry Redd conducted a series of successful prescribed burns on Lackey Fan in the Spring and Fall of 2002. Invasive species such as pinyon and juniper have taken over the area and are now in stressed condition due to drought and Ips beetles.

Lackey Fan is a large alluvial formation that currently serves as grazing land and winter range for mule deer and elk. The Fan is located five miles northwest of the community of

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Grass and forbs are returning to the Lackey Fan treatment area in the La Sal Mountains of Utah.

La Sal on the southwest slopes of the La Sal Mountains.

With assistance from the Manti La Sal Forest, crews successfully burned 150 acres a day for a total of 1,000 acres.

The area was previously chained in the 1960's and was due for maintenance in order to improve wildlife forage and rangeland conditions.

As of April 2004, grasses and forbs are coming back vigorously.

Contact: Heather O'Hanlon, BLM Moab Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist, (435) 259-2184

Ray Mesa Fuel Mitigation Project

This summer, BLM's Moab Field Office in coordination with the Utah Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands plans to implement a hazardous fuels reduction project on 355 acres of public lands adjacent to and surrounding private homes and state property along County Road 162 in the vicinity of Ray Mesa. Phase II will include 3,000 acres to the east and south of the community.

Approximately 30 miles southeast of Moab and eight miles east of LaSal, Ray Mesa receives countless strikes from lightning during monsoon season. The neighboring community and wildland fire fighters have had their fair share of close calls while defending homes from wildfire. Private property and the safety of homeowners would be jeopardized in the event of another fire, as some of the existing homes have been constructed of highly flammable materials and are currently surrounded by hazardous fuels.

In the past 100 years, a variety of actions such as wildfire suppression, timber harvest and livestock grazing in the proposed treatment area have altered the vegetation. The proposed action would conform to rangeland health standards by providing a more reliable forage base for livestock and improved vegetative diversity in the Ray Mesa area.

Equipment called a "bull hog" has been brought in to reduce invasive species and beetle infected trees on terrain that is less than 30 percent grade. Canyons and steeper terrain are being treated by squads and crews with chain saws with fuel piled for burning during winter after slash has

cured and snow is on the ground.

Homeowners have already combined efforts with the state to write a community fire plan. Lots and homes are currently being assessed for hazardous fuel reduction. The local volunteer fire department has been trained and certified and has secured BLM Rural Fire Assistance grant money for wildland fire fighting equipment and additional training.

Contact: Heather O'Hanlon, BLM Moab Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist, (435) 259-2184



Before and after photos of part of the Ray Mesa hazardous fuel reduction project near Moab, Utah.

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Prescribed Fire Partners in Southeastern Utah

A successful prescribed fire was conducted at Salt Creek Mesa, South of Canyonlands National Park and North of Manti-LaSal National Forest Abajo Mountains.

At the request of Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Nature Conservancy, the Bureau of Land Management Monticello Field Office and Manti-La Sal National Forest, conducted a prescribed fire and reseeding project.

The reduction of regenerative piñon and juniper and old slash piles due to chaining treatment in the 1950's was necessary to improve forage for grazing and wildlife.

The planning for the Salt Creek Mesa project started during the spring of 2001. On the ground implementation

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation helped fund reseeding following the prescribed burn.



began in the spring of 2002 and will be ongoing until the project is complete.

Crews burned "black lines" on boundaries to protect adjacent resources in spring of 2002. Then 1,300 acres was ignited by crew members in the fall of 2003. The next phase will consist of hand igniting another 500 acres.

Aerial seeding was done on 383 acres by helicopter in January 2004. Funding for reseeding came from the Division of Wildlife Resources and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Additional phases of the project are ongoing and dependent on weather

conditions. Despite the six years of drought and dry condition of the landscape, shrubs, grasses and forbs are already sprouting vigorously in the treatment area.

Contact: Heather O'Hanlon, BLM Moab Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist, (435) 259-2184

Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Showing Promise

The Dry Fork Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project carried out by the Vernal Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management is already paying off.

On July 19, 2004, late evening lightning struck a stump inside one of the twelve sections included in the project area. The wind driven fire pushed from the cedar stump to the surrounding pile of piñon juniper created earlier as crews cleared a fuel break all the way around that section of the project.

The fuel break did its job keeping the fire from escaping outside of the 37 acre parcel into the thick stand of cedar trees which cover the face of the mountain. With the aid of rain and the fuel break fire crews were able to keep the fire size to one acre of the slash pile.

The Dry Fork Hazardous Fuels Project is located in the Dry Fork Community listed in the Federal Register as a community at risk. The wildland urban interface project was planned to aid in the protection of the homes and community located just below the project site. It was designed to reduce the hazardous fuel loading through mechanical treatments and broadcast burning.



Hard working fire crew helps improve wildlife habitat.

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The Dry Fork Fire burned along the edge of the fuel break, which kept it from escaping into a stand of cedar.



A contract crew member at work during the reduction project.

Management divided the project into two parts of 539 and 232 acres respectively. These were divided into twelve parcels laid out in a mosaic pattern.

The cutting part of the project was contracted out. Contractors started work the first of April and were done by the first part of May. Since then fuels crews from the Vernal BLM have been working to clear a 66 foot width in from the outer perimeter of the parcels by piling the downed fuels towards the inside of the parcel.

Each parcel will be burned this fall or early next spring once there is snow on the ground and then reseeded. The seed mixture that will be used will consist of alfalfa, small burnet, Piante orchardgrass, sainfoin, yellow sweetclover, Wyoming big sagebrush, whitestem rabbitbrush, western wheatgrass, and Lewis flax.

The Dry Fork Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project was planned targeting the hazardous fuels reduction and community assistance points brought out in the National Fire Plan. Although the project is not completed, fire management and crews from the Vernal Field Office and the public are already seeing benefits come from their efforts

in hazardous fuels reduction. For further information call the BLM Fire Management Building at (435) 781-2746 or visit the BLM website at <http://www.blm.gov/utah/vernal>.

Contact: Deni Sorenson, (435) 781-2746

Rural Fire Assistance Grant Benefits Fast Growing Community in Utah

Saratoga Springs is a community with a population 7,000 located at the base of Lake Mountain. BLM's Salt Lake Field Office manages a patchwork of intermixed public and private on top of the mountain. The community of Saratoga Springs has experienced a 200 percent population growth in the last year. Paralleling the population boom is the increase of public land users on Lake Mountain.

Mother Nature visits Lake Mountain nearly as often as the recreationists.

Lightning and people have caused many fires on the mountain, and the Saratoga Springs Volunteer Fire Department is typically first on scene.

Dave Vicars was appointed chief of the newly formed volunteer fire department for the growing community two years ago. He is very concerned about wildfire. Understanding that his department is usually the first to respond, Vicars has utilized the Rural Fire Assistance program offered through the BLM and State of Utah in an effort to maximize the protection for Saratoga Spings.

With program grants, Vicars was able to enhance the knowledge and fire protection capability of his rural fire district by providing education and training, protective clothing and equipment purchase on a cost share basis.

Saratoga Springs was able to enhance their wildland firefighting fleet by acquiring two 1,000 gallon slide-in water tanks, two heavy bins slide-in units, and are in the



Dave Vicars, chief of the Saratoga Springs Volunteer Fire Department, with part of the wildland fire fighting fleet.

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process of rebuilding a former heavy BLM engine.

Contact: Erin Darboven or Teresa Rigby, BLM Fire Mitigation & Education Specialists (801) 977-4300

Smokey Celebrates 60th at the Emery and Carbon County Fairs

The Moab Bureau of Land Management Fire Division and Manti-LaSal National Forest joined to host fire prevention booths at the Emery and Carbon County Fairs. Both counties are in very rural settings and are abundant with interface settings. It was an ideal opportunity to spread fire prevention messages.

Both fairs are well attended. Hundreds of adults and children visited the booths. Firewise, Utah Living with Fire, Fire Use Fires, RMP and Smokey Bear Information was shared with all. Smokey Bear goodies were the highlight for the kids.

The U.S. Forest Service arranged birthday festivities and Smokey Bear appearance. BLM arranged to have materials and goodies to give to the kids. The BLM Price Field Office



Getting some exposure at the Smokey birthday are (l to r) Andy Polaehne, Ferron Forest Service firefighter, Pat Gubbins, BLM Price Field Office Manager, and Gene Terland, BLM Utah Associate State Director.

also made their draft RMP materials available

Questions about all aspects of fire and fire management were answered by the agency representatives working the booths. The BLM, U.S.F.S. and Utah State Division of Forestry, Fire and State Land had representatives to help with the booth.

Contact: Heather O'Hanlon, BLM Moab Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist, (435) 259-2184

Montana

Butte Field Office Participates in First Annual Montana "Wildfire Awareness Week"

The Butte Field Office observed Montana's first ever "Wildfire Awareness Week" May 9-15 in a big way. The week-long campaign promoted Firewise principles for home construction and landscaping techniques to improve a home's survivability when threatened by wildfire.

Butte Field Office Manager Rick Hotaling, Fuels Specialist Charles Tuss, and Fire Mitigation- Education Specialist Terina Mullen, who participate in the Butte Fire Protection Association, organized and attended a media event for local television stations.

The group showcased the new "Defensible Space" signs that will be erected around the Butte area. Jim Lynch, a local State Farm insurance agent, donated the signs, and the rural fire departments will be installing them over the summer. In addition, the

chief executive of Silver Bow County gave the media a close-up look at the fuels reduction work on her property. The media event was part of the ongoing effort to educate and involve homeowners on defensible space projects.

During the week Fire Management Officer John Thompson debuted on "Partyline," a local radio talk show. John discussed wildfire awareness, defensible space principles, the outlook for this fire season, and other related topics. Listeners to Friday's Partyline had a chance to test their knowledge of wildfire trivia, with winners receiving a free car wash.



(l to r) Butte Field Manager Rick Hotaling; Butte State Farm Insurance Agent Jim Lynch; Silver Bow County Chief Executive Judy Jacobson; Terra Verde FD Chief Mike Leary; Little Basin Creek FD Chief Dave Kneebone; and Butte Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist Terina Mullen. (Photo by Charles Tuss)

The joint effort among local, state, and federal organizations was designed to raise awareness across Montana about the important work homeowners and communities can do to protect themselves from the effects of wildfire.

Residents of Southcentral Montana Become "Firewise"

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In the cold of January, few homeowners are thinking about wildland fire. In fact, they're probably spending a lot of the time trying to start fires and worrying about the adequacy of their wood supply. Nevertheless, nearly 100 Helena residents braved the cold last winter to attend Firewise workshops in Montana's capital city. The Tri-County Fire Working Group sponsored the two one-day workshops.

Principles for home construction and landscaping techniques that improve a home's survivability when threatened by wildfire were at the top of the list of interests of those attending the Firewise workshops held in Helena.

The goals of the local workshops were to improve safety in the wildland-urban interface by learning to share responsibility; to create and nurture local partnerships for improved decisions in communities; and to encourage the integration of Firewise concepts into community and disaster mitigation planning.

One section of the workshops was devoted to a panel discussion of how the wildland urban interface impacts the local community and the agencies that have jurisdictional responsibility for fire suppression in those areas. In addition, groups of participants used collaborative problem-solving methods and the latest computer technology to complete exercise tasks. The groups worked with an existing subdivision and a proposed subdivision in the scenarios. Completion of the exercises highlighted the need for interdisciplinary problem-solving and cooperation across ownership boundaries.



Firewise facilitators (l to r) Pat Cross, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; Larry Bloxom, Clancy VFD; Pat McKelvey, Lewis & Clark County Mitigation; Gabe Witham, Forest Service; Michael McHugh, Lewis & Clark County Planning; Terina Mullen, BLM; Jeremy Pris, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Back Row: Rocky Infanger, Wolf Creek VFD. (Photo by Tim Murray)

“The attendance by a cross-section of the disciplines from government agencies; professionals from the insurance, real estate, and banking fields; and a wide variety of homeowners was extremely rewarding,” said Pat McKelvey, organizer of the workshops. “These folks learned to understand risk assessment and the recognition of their own risk and responsibility to address it through mitigation procedures.”

The collaborative effort among local, state, and federal organizations was designed to raise awareness in southcentral Montana about the important work homeowners and communities can do to protect themselves from the effects of wildfire.

*Dave Vickery, editor
Sheri Ascherfeld, layout and design*